

# Poet-grocer loved and rallied Midway and then joined his cherished wife

CONNECTIONS 9-4-89



DENNIS  
LYTHGOE

Midway's annual Swiss Days, just concluded, is an almost unparalleled Utah celebration. Since 1947, thousands have converged on Midway to share in a festival of Swiss flags, banners, emblems, and costumes.

Natives and visitors eat braided Swiss bread, pastries with thin dough fried in deep fat and sprinkled with sugar, cake wafers impressed with Swiss designs and homemade sauerkraut.

Until 1978, when he died of a heart attack at the age of 85, the figure at the center of Swiss Days was the grocer-poet, Guy Coleman, who stood in his store, directing strangers, milling with the crowd at the chuck-wagon breakfast, dishing out his own homemade ice cream, his eyes sparkling like firelight.



Guy E. Coleman

His daughter, Rose Hoyt, remembers him as a man who loved to visit with people and listen to their problems and to read the classics to his children.

This year, Swiss Days was given a new

twist with a special tribute to Coleman, a man who seems preeminently worth knowing. Clinton Larson, longtime BYU professor of English and poet in his own right, wrote a prize-winning essay to honor Coleman, entitled, "Guy Coleman: The Singer of Midway," and he enjoys talking about him still.

As Larson remembers him, Coleman was an "erstwhile Welshman" reminiscent of "a freshly baked loaf of white bread." He was not only the grocer but a county commissioner for 30 years, elected as a Democrat in a Republican community, obviously a diplomat, the man whose sense of balance held the community together. In 1960, Coleman was given the "Tuttle Award," as the outstanding county official of the State of Utah.

Larson says Coleman "lived in Midway for the peace it brought," although he was sometimes as "lonely as an owl in a loft, especially at the end of the swing shift in his store."

It seemed to be Coleman's job to keep the peace in the town of Midway. Using his poetry and camaraderie, he presided over the cultural diversity. Coleman was a poet un-

polished by professors and tutors, and he occasionally sold his book of poems, "Pine Whispers and Autumn Leaves" at his grocery store, although most people reached for their groceries over the book without noticing it was there.

In "Pine Whispers" he said:

*I have no complaint — sincerely I pray  
That if another place is being prepared  
for us*

*That it contains lush mountain valleys  
and singing mountain streams,  
A Timpanogos,  
Beautiful canyons, green groves of pine  
and aspen . . .*

*A change of seasons . . .*

*A land peopled with those I love . . .*

Coleman sincerely loved Midway. He once told Larson, "I don't want to die — it can't be any better than this."

But when his wife fell ill, his spirits dropped. He said, "I can't do without her."

Coleman's poetry was filled with hopeful-

ness about the hereafter, but when his wife, Teresa, died, he said, "She's gone. I can't stay behind." When Clinton Larson reminded him of his poetry and his love for Timpanogos, "like frosted crystal under a new moon," it fell on deaf ears.

Opening his book, Coleman read:

*I want to be there  
In the opaque of death's night.  
In the silence and the gloom.*

*I want to be there  
To welcome my loved ones  
Who may be confused  
Who may be afraid  
Crossing the dark river.*

Several months passed before Larson came to Midway again, and when he did, Coleman was not there. "Where's your father, Pete?"

"He's gone. We buried him beside Mother last Sunday."

Guy Coleman loved Midway, but he loved Teresa more.



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